

Early Essentials Practice Moments: Responsive Interactions

Amanda Perez: Responsive interactions, taking the time to observe children and families, wonder about what they're communicating with their words and their behaviors, and then responding, offers small moments of connection and learning about one another. These interactions form the foundation of work with the youngest children in their families.

Use this practice moment and the practice guide to explore responsive interactions. This home visitor has been working with two-year-old Bella and her mother for a long time. Notice the comfort they have with each other as they interact. This home visitor has worked hard to establish a strong relationship with this mother and child. The mother and the home visitor have a lot to cover in today's visit. They plan to work on motor skills and language. And they've planned several experiences for this 90 minutes. Watch the signals Bella sends and how these adults respond.

What is Bella interested in as her mother and home visitor talk? How do you know?

Home Visitor: Lettuce and carrots. Now, what new thing have you noticed she's been doing since we met last week? Roll the ball!

Amanda: What do you think she tells us here?

Home Visitor: What is squiggling in the dirt? Here are some worms. Has she seen the worms outside yet on the sidewalk? What's fluttering behind the bush? There's the butterfly.

Amanda: Notice how her mother responds.

Mother: B. C. This is number one. Can you say "one"? One.

Amanda: How do you think Bella feels when these two adults figure it out?

Mother: You want to play with me? One, two, three. Uh-oh. It's okay. Throw it back. One, two, three. Uh-oh. Let me see. One, two. Are you ready?

Home Visitor: Catch it!

Mother: One, two, three. Uh-oh. You need to put your hands together.

Home Visitor: That's a good try.

Mother: One, two, three.

Home Visitor: You gonna throw it to me? Oh, it bounced!

Amanda: Let's watch again. Watch for the signals Bella sends and the ways her mother and home visitor respond. Notice how Bella turns her interest to the ball. She examines it and then rolls it away.

Home Visitor: Roll the ball.

Amanda: Bella keeps that ball close to her even when she's engaged in a new activity. It is still important to her. Bella's mother notices Bella's interest in the ball and helps her notice and name other details on the ball. Sometimes children don't follow the plans we make. In the end, the adults in this interaction

recognized Bella's cues. The goal here is to work on physical and language skills. Right? And these adults know that by following Bella's interests they can be most effective in supporting her learning.

Notice Bella's delight. So, even as these adults are helping Bella build physical and language skills, they're also sending her a message so crucial to her emotional development. They're showing her that she matters, her interests matter, and that she has a role in her learning, too.

To learn more about fostering responsive interactions with the youngest children, use the resources listed in the practice guide, or watch Early Essentials Webisode 8, featuring Janet Gonzalez-Mena, an early-childhood specialist, and other experts talking about those small moments with a big impact.